GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN VOTERS' BEHAVIOUR IN THE 2023 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN IDAH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KOGI STATE

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Keywords

Abstract

Research Problem
This study examines the problem of gender inequality and the barriers faced by women voters in Idah during the 2023 election. Despite constitutional guarantees of political participation, women in the region continue to experience limited electoral engagement due to entrenched cultural norms, patriarchal structures, and socio-political constraints that undermine their agency in the electoral process.
Methods / Theory
The study is grounded in feminist theory, which provides a critical lens for analyzing gendered power relations and women's political participation. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 400 women voters to examine voting patterns, motivations, and participation barriers. Qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews with party leaders, offering deeper insights into the social, cultural, and emotional factors shaping women's electoral behavior.
Results
The findings indicate that traditional gender roles and cultural expectations significantly influence women's voting behavior in Idah. However, the study also reveals a growing level of political awareness and mobilization among women voters. Key factors positively influencing participation include educational attainment, economic independence, and peer influence. Despite these gains, patriarchal attitudes, political marginalization, and the underrepresentation of women in elective offices continue to pose substantial challenges to meaningful participation.
Conclusion
The study concludes that women's voting behavior in Idah is shaped by a complex interaction of cultural, economic, and socio-political factors. While progress is evident in women's political consciousness, structural and institutional barriers persist, limiting their full participation in the

electoral process. Addressing these challenges requires sustained efforts toward gender inclusivity and political reform.

Key Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to the literature on gender and electoral politics by providing context-specific empirical evidence on women voters in Idah. It deepens understanding of how cultural norms and socio-economic variables interact to shape women's political participation, thereby filling a gap in localized studies on women's electoral behavior in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study recommends the strengthening of civic education programs targeted at women, the promotion of grassroots mobilization initiatives, and the adoption of gender-sensitive policies within political parties. These measures are essential for empowering women electorally and fostering inclusive democratic participation in Idah and similar socio-cultural contexts.

Introduction

Gender inequality presents substantial obstacles to social, economic, and political advancement worldwide. Cultural, economic, and socio-political issues have led to the marginalisation of women in Nigeria, especially in Kogi State. This study examines gender inequality and women's voting habits in Idah. Comprehending these dynamics is crucial for devising suitable interventions that can improve women's political engagement and representation in the region. Gender inequality in Nigeria is evident in various dimensions, including political representation, economic involvement, educational access, and societal roles. Numerous studies demonstrate that women in Nigeria are inadequately represented in political positions, with pronounced inequities observable in both local and national governance structures. The National Gender Policy of Nigeria indicates that women constitute almost fifty percent of the population; yet, they are markedly under-represented in political arenas, occupying only six percent of senior political roles as of 2021.Various factors contribute to this discrepancy, including socio-cultural norms that sustain patriarchal institutions.

In numerous communities, conventional ideas frequently stipulate that political positions and decision-making be exclusively assigned to men, resulting in restricted civic participation by women. Moreover, economic limitations, including insufficient access to resources and finance, intensify the circumstances, establishing additional obstacles for women seeking to engage in politics or use their voting rights. The political landscape in Kogi State, situated in north-central Nigeria, is marked by its varied ethnic groupings and intricate political dynamics. The state has experienced numerous political shifts and upheavals driven by ethnicity, religion, and party politics. The Idah local government region has traditionally encountered governance issues, including corruption, election violence, and inadequate infrastructure.

In recent elections, women's participation in Idaho has been a central issue. Comprehending the determinants that affect women's voting behaviour, such as candidate perceptions, availability of electoral information, and the role of social networks, is essential for tackling the identified gender imbalance.Women's voting behaviour pertains to the attitudes and actions of individuals toward electoral involvement. The

voting behaviour of women is influenced by a complex interaction of social, economic, and political factors. These encompass educational achievement, societal norms, individual convictions, and the political landscape. In Idaho, obstacles such as insufficient knowledge and understanding of political rights may impede women's participation in elections or their ability to make educated decisions. Studies demonstrate that women are more inclined to vote when they perceive that their wants and concerns are well addressed by candidates.

Nonetheless, when politicians neglect to address gender-specific concerns such as healthcare, education, and security, women may become disheartened from participating in the electoral process. The significance of peer influence and religious leaders is paramount; women often depend on the perspectives of prominent individuals in their communities when determining their voting decisions. The 2023 election has witnessed numerous initiatives designed to advance gender equality and enhance the presence of women in Nigerian politics. The Women's Political Empowerment Project and analogous initiatives seek to provide women with the skills and resources required for political engagement. Comprehending the behaviour of women voters is crucial for achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive governance. Gana and Audu (2023) assert that women's involvement in the political process is essential for incorporating varied viewpoints in decision-making and policy development. In Idaho, where women comprise a substantial segment of the population, their voting behaviour can significantly impact the political landscape and affect the representation of their interests within local government. Idaho is known for its cultural diversity, economic endeavours, and historical importance, rendering it an ideal context for examining the interaction between gender, politics, and voting behaviours.

Women's political engagement and voting behaviour have been extensively studied and advocated for worldwide. In Nigeria, as in numerous other nations, women comprise a substantial segment of the population yet frequently lack adequate representation in political decision-making processes. Kogi State, situated in North-Central Nigeria, serves as an intriguing case study for analysing the voting behaviour of women, owing to its intricate socio-political dynamics and the significance of comprehending women's roles in the election process. Idah has observed the effects of gender inequities on political representation, since women frequently encounter obstacles to their active involvement in politics and government.

Research Questions

i. What are the socio-economic factors that influence women voters' behaviour in Idah?

ii. Does cultural norms and traditions impact women voters' engagement in the electoral process?

iii. What are the barriers that hinder women’s exercise of their right to vote.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

i. To explain how the socio-economic factors influence women voters' behaviour.

ii. to examine how cultural norms and traditions sharpens women voters' engagement in the electoral process.

iii. To analyse the barriers that hinder women's exercise of their right to vote.

Conceptual Clarification Political Participation

Political participation refers to voluntary efforts undertaken by the populace to affect public policies, either directly or via influencing the election of policy-makers. It encompasses acts include voting, campaigning, giving, contacting officials, petitioning, protesting, and collaborating with others on diverse concerns. Political engagement denotes voluntary actions by the general populace aimed at influencing public policy, either directly or via impacting the selection of policymakers. Activities of this nature encompass participating in elections, assisting a political campaign, contributing financially to a candidate or cause, communicating with officials, petitioning, protesting, and collaborating with others on various causes. Specific activities group into modalities of participation. Anifowose (1999) defines political involvement as the voluntary engagement of citizens in the political process, encompassing voting, political discourse, party affiliation, and the assumption of public office. Omodia (2010) defines political participation as the engagement of individuals in political activities intended to affect public policy, decision-making, and governance. According to Okolie (2005), political participation includes any actions by citizens aimed at influencing government policy, whether directly or indirectly, such as protests, voting, and civic engagements.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality denotes the systematic disparity in power, status, and opportunity among persons attributed to their gender. This difference is evident in multiple realms, including social, economic, political, and cultural facets of life. Gender inequality is entrenched in historical, socio-cultural, legal, and institutional structures that favour one gender, frequently disadvantaging women and gender minorities in relation to men. Gender inequality in Nigeria exemplifies patriarchal structures that undermine women's rights, participation, and access to social, economic, and political power, Mama (2018). Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment and access to opportunities for men and women, perpetuated by cultural norms and institutions in Nigeria, Aina (2020). Gender inequality arises from the imposition of Western gender ideas on Nigerian society, resulting in structural disadvantages for women, according to Oyewumi (2017). Gender inequality in Nigeria is the systemic marginalisation of women and girls by discriminatory laws, practices, and socio-cultural norms, according to Akiyode-Afolabi (2022). Gender inequality manifests in the deprivation of legal rights, educational opportunities, and political representation for Nigerian women, sustained by religious and cultural traditions, Ibrahim (2021).

Voting Behaviour

Voting behaviour pertains to the choices and actions of individuals during the act of casting their ballots in elections. It includes the causes, attitudes, and motivations that affect an individual's choice of candidate or party to endorse. Akinsanya (2005) perceives voting conduct as a reflection of political socialisation, wherein familial, educational, and peer influences progressively shape electoral choices. Omotoso (2010) characterises voting behaviour as a dynamic process influenced by media, political campaigns, and issue-oriented debates, yet nevertheless limited by ethnicity and religion. Aderemi (2018) characterises voting

behaviour as a class-based phenomena, wherein various socio-economic groups in Nigeria cast their votes depending on their economic interests and policy anticipations. These researchers emphasise that voting behaviour in Nigeria is influenced by various elements, including ethnicity, religion, economy, political culture, and institutional credibility.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In analyzing the behavior of women voters in Kogi State, particularly in Idah Local Government, several theoretical frameworks can provide a lens through which to understand and interpret their voting decisions. This section outlines key theoretical perspective that can inform the appraisal of women voters' behavior in the context of this study.

Feminist Political Theory: Feminist Political Theory examines power dynamics, social structures, and gender inequalities in political systems. By applying a feminist lens to the study of women voters in Idah, Kogi State, researchers can explore how patriarchal norms, institutional barriers, and cultural practices shape women's participation in elections and governance. This theoretical perspective highlights the importance of addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting women's political empowerment (Eisenstein, 1984). Contextual Focus: While previous work has broadly applied feminist theory to understand gender inequality in various regions, this paper specifically targets Idah, a context that combines unique cultural and political dynamics. This localized focus allows for a nuanced exploration of how regional socio-political structures specifically shape women's electoral behaviors, filling a gap in existing literature that may overlook this unique environment.

Mixed-Methods Approach: Many studies may primarily rely on qualitative analyses or quantitative surveys. In contrast, the integrative mixed-methods approach combines both statistical analysis and qualitative interviews. This method allows for a comprehensive understanding of women's voting behaviors, exceeding the reach of prior works that may have engaged with only one method. The combination of large-scale surveys with in-depth interviews provides a richer dataset that illustrates both the numerical trends and the personal narratives behind women's political participation.

Intersectional Emphasis: While intersectionality has been a key focus in feminist studies, the paper specifically investigates the interplay of race, class, ethnicity, and gender within the electoral dynamics of Idah. By incorporating an intersectional analysis tailored to the specific demographic and cultural fabric of the region, the research reveals how these dimensions uniquely influence women's experiences and engagement in the political landscape, distinguishing it from studies that may apply intersectionality more generically.

Theoretical Depth: The paper does not merely apply feminist theory but critically engages with various strands, such as Judith Butler's concept of performativity and Bell Hooks' focus on intersectionality. By weaving these theorists' insights into the fabric of your analysis, you underscore how gender roles are not just socially constructed but also actively contested among women in Idah, emphasizing women's agency amid systemic barriers—a nuance that previous studies may not have thoroughly articulated.

Policy Implications: The research contributes substantively to feminist theory by articulating specific policy recommendations tailored to the Idah context, such as enhanced civic education

and grassroots mobilization. Previous work may have identified barriers to participation but often stops short of proposing actionable steps. By delineating clear strategies rooted in feminist theory, the paper goes beyond analysis to advocacy, emphasizing practical implications for improving women's political participation.

Empowerment Focus: Unlike existing literature that may predominantly highlight challenges women face, this paper also emphasizes the agency and active resistance of women voters against oppressive systems. This dual focus on barriers and empowerment perspectives enriches the feminist discourse surrounding electoral participation and sheds light on women's resilience and activism, allowing for a more balanced view of their experiences.

In summary, the paper distinguishes itself by focusing on a specific locale, employing a mixed-methods approach, emphasizing intersectionality within its contextual analysis, engaging with substantive theoretical frameworks, proposing actionable policy recommendations, and highlighting women's agency in political processes. Through these innovative avenues, your research contributes to a deeper understanding of gender inequality and women's voting behavior within the framework of feminist theory in Idah.

Research Methodology

This segment delves into the methodology employed in this research, providing a detailed account of the study area, research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques used to address the research questions. This comprehensive overview aims to ensure the transparency and replicability of the study, allowing readers to understand the foundation upon which the findings are built.

3.2 Research Design

This research adopts a survey research design and this was used to analyse the quantitative data collected through surveys. Statistical analysis involved descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, means, standard deviations) to summarize the data and inferential statistics (e.g., t-tests, chi-square tests) to test hypotheses and draw conclusions about relationships between variables. The research aims at collecting data and systematically describing them, the characteristics, features, or facts about a population. For the descriptive survey to be scientifically conducted, the following steps were followed appropriately. They are sources of data, instruments of data collection, study area and population, sampling format and study sample, method of data presentation and analysis.

Population of the Study

The population of the study is 56,743 been the total number of registered voters in Idah in the just concluded 2023 Elections.

Location of study

Idah is a town located in kogi state, Nigeria, and serves as a pivotal area within the Igala kingdom. The population of Idah, as part of Kogi state, reflects a diverse community comprising various ethnic groups, predominantly the Igala people. According to the most recent estimates, the population of Idah is 107,500 by city population statistics, maps and charts (2022).

Sampling Techniques and Sample size:

Arising from sparsely large number of registered voters in Idah and the impossibilities of conducting a survey on the total registered voters, a sample survey was employed as a

subset of the total population of registered voters. Sampling techniques refers to the technique or the procedure the research adopts in selecting items for the sample, laying down the number of items to be included in the sample. While sampling size refers to as the number or sample of observations or measurements taken during a study

Since the population of the study is known, formula for proportions was used to determine the sample size, using a significance level of 0.05.

Since the population of the study is known,Taro Yamane's (1976) formula was used to determine the sample size, using a significance level of 0.05.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N\,(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = Sample Size

N = Population of the study

e = Tolerable error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{56{,}743}{1 + 56{,}743\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{56{,}743}{56{,}744\,(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{56{,}743}{141.86}$$

n = 399.99

App. n = 400

Therefore, the sample size is 400

Having derived the sample size for the study, proportional technique is adopted to distribute the sample size across Idah local government area. Interview was conducted to get information that will support the administered questionnaires. The research engages a party leader from Idah

This research adopts the use of primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through the help of questionnaires. The sources of the secondary data on the other hand include, review of official documents, journal articles, scholarly articles, previous research works, newspaper publications, and internet resources among others.

This study adopts structured questionnaire; this is to enable the research get comprehensive information. The questionnaire is structured into three sections; Section, A being the cover letter; Section B contains the Bio-data of respondents; and Section C contains the questions?

Once the data has been collected from the questionnaires, the next step will involve data analysis. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires will be analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and averages to summarize the responses.

Once the data has been collected from the questionnaires and in-depth interviews, the next step will involve data analysis. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires will be analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and averages to summarize the responses. The qualitative data gathered from the in-depth interviews will be analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, themes, and emerging insights from the participants' responses.In this study, references were provided to all cited scholars. All necessary letters of approval were collected. The respondents' identity is concealed and assured that the data collected will be used for the sole purpose of the study.

Total No of Questionnaire Administered	Total No of Questionnaire Retrieved	Percentage (%)
400	390	97.5

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

Table 4.5 The factors that affect women political participation in Idah (390 Respondents)

S/N	VARIABLE	SA	A	NR	D	SD
1	Lack of access to education and information affect women political participation	98(24.5)	180(45)	3(0.75)	99(24.75)	10(2.5)
2	Societal expectations and gender role that confined women to domestic spheres affect women political participation	79(19.75)	195(48.75)	4(1)	100(25)	12(3)
3	Discriminatory laws and limited representation of women in decision making bodies affects their political participation	80(20)	194(48.5)	1(0.25)	99(24.75)	16(4)
4	The demand to balance political responsibilities with personal and professional commitments affect women political participation	54(13.5)	195(48.75)	6(1.5)	119(29.75)	16(4)

5	Rigging elections, vote buying, violence and intimidation are serious factors that affect women political participation	105(26.25)	177(44.25)	2(0.5)	95(23.75)	11(2.75
6	Limited access to financial network and resources affect women political participation	64(16)	201(50.25)	4(1)	104(26)	17(4.25)
7	Lack of access to polling station affect women political participation	65(16.25)	163(40.75)	2(0.5)	143(35.75)	17(4.25)

Source: Field Work, 2025

Discussion of Findings

The aforementioned figure indicates that a substantial majority (69.5%) of respondents concur that the lack of access to education and knowledge significantly impacts women's political engagement, with 24.5% strongly agreeing and 45% agreeing. This outcome supports the findings of Omoregie and Orobosa (2009), Aja-Okorie (2013), and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), which indicated that inadequate educational attainment, especially among women, is associated with diminished voter turnout. This is a critical issue, with merely a small fraction (2.5%) expressing strong disagreement, signifying widespread acknowledgement of this obstacle. This underscores the significance of knowledge and understanding in politically empowering women. Insufficient education might restrict awareness of political procedures, candidates, and rights, potentially diminishing political activity.

Moreover, societal expectations and gender norms that restrict women to domestic realms demonstrate significant concurrence, with 68.5% combined in the strongly agree and agree categories. This outcome indicates that entrenched gender norms, which compel women to prioritise domestic responsibilities over political involvement, remain prevalent. This corroborates the findings of Oluyemi (2016) and Kelly (2019). Societal perceptions may impose constraints on women's time and energy for political engagement, implying that political and social reforms aimed at achieving gender equality could facilitate increased female participation. Furthermore, 68.5% of respondents concur that discriminatory legislation and the inadequate representation of women in decision-making bodies adversely impact women's political engagement.

This represents a significant obstacle, with 48.5% of respondents agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing. This aligns with the findings of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), which indicated that women in Nigeria are less frequently nominated as candidates by political parties due to discriminatory practices and biases against female candidates (IDEA, 2017). The absence of legal backing for gender equality and insufficient representation in leadership roles are critical considerations. These findings underscore the necessity for legal reforms and policies that guarantee enhanced representation and support for women in political arenas.

62.25% of respondents concur with the assertion on the balance of political responsibilities with personal and professional commitments; yet, it exhibits the lowest number in the "Strongly Agree" category at 13.5%, alongside a comparatively greater disagreement rate of 29.75%. This may indicate ambivalence on the significance or influence of this aspect.

The difficulty of reconciling personal, professional, and political roles seems to be a concern, however not as critical as other issues. Some respondents may not perceive the conflict between personal and political commitments as a significant obstacle, but others might regard it as a crucial factor in women's political engagement, along with Ette's (2023) findings. Election-related violence, rigging, and intimidation garnered the greatest consensus, with 70.5% of respondents in agreement, including 26.25% who strongly agreed and 44.25% who agreed. This indicates a broad acknowledgement of the detrimental effects of election malpractice (e.g., vote buying, violence, rigging) on women's involvement. The significant consensus indicates the seriousness of electoral violence and manipulation as obstacles to women's participation, corroborating the findings of Ette and Akpan-Obong (2022) and Agbalajobi (2021). Sixty-six-point twenty-five percent of respondents concur that restricted access to financial resources and networks impedes women's political participation. 50.25% concur, and 16% strongly concur. Financial limitations pose a significant challenge, as pursuing a political office, campaigning, and remaining knowledgeable about political matters frequently necessitate cash. Women with restricted access to financial networks or those who are economically challenged may lack the resources to engage actively in political processes; these findings align with those of Ette and Akpan-Obong (2022) and Nkereuwem (2023).

This underscores the necessity for financial support systems to promote women's political participation, particularly in environments where monetary resources are essential for political campaigns. The least pressing issue is the lack of access to polling stations, as only 57% of respondents concur (16.25% strongly agree and 40.75% agree). This aligns with the report by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which recognises the difficulties women encounter in accessing polling stations, especially in rural regions. The availability of voting facilities significantly influences women's voting behaviour. A significant 35.75% dissent from this assertion, indicating that access to polling booths may not pose a considerable concern for many women. Although this may be a significant issue in specific areas, the evidence indicates that, on the whole, it is a lesser concern relative to other obstacles such as societal expectations, discriminatory legislation, or electoral violence. This may imply disparities in access to polling stations across urban and rural areas, or it could suggest that some women already possess access to voting facilities and prioritise other variables as more significant.

Conclusion

The evaluation of women voters' behaviour in Idaho offers essential insights into the factors that affect women's engagement in the electoral process. The findings indicate that although awareness of women's political rights is increasing, numerous difficulties remain that hinder their complete participation in the political sphere. Socio-cultural constraints, including ingrained gender norms and societal expectations, persist in restricting women to domestic domains, frequently dissuading them from engaging in political activities.

Recommendations

The study has the recommendations

i. Advocate for Women's Education and Awareness Initiatives: Enhancing access to education and political information for women in Idaho is imperative. Governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) ought to initiate awareness efforts to educate women of their political rights, the electoral process, and the significance of voting. These efforts might be executed via local media, community forums, and seminars, equipping women with the knowledge necessary to make educated election choices.

ii. Enhance Female Representation in Political Leadership: A highly successful method to promote women's participation is to augment the presence of women in political positions. Political parties must to proactively promote and assist female candidates, particularly in local government elections, guaranteeing that women possess equitable opportunities to contest for office. Gender quotas in political parties and decision-making bodies should be implemented to guarantee adequate representation of women's voices in governance.
iii. Facilitate Women's Socio-Economic Empowerment: The socio-economic position of women significantly influences their political participation. Programs that foster women's economic autonomy, including microcredit initiatives, vocational training, and employment generation, can enhance political engagement. Enhancing women's access to resources and financial networks will better enable them to participate in political campaigns, cast votes, and seek office.
iv. Tackle Election-related Violence and Intimidation: Election-related violence and intimidation continue to pose substantial obstacles to women's participation in Idah. The administration should enhance legal frameworks to guarantee secure and tranquil elections. Political parties and local authorities must implement measures to guarantee that women can exercise their voting rights free from assault, intimidation, or coercion. Severe sanctions for electoral violence and voter intimidation must be implemented to foster a secure atmosphere for women to exercise their voting rights. By adopting these guidelines, Idaho can cultivate a more inclusive political landscape that promotes increased engagement of women. These measures will enhance women's participation in elections and promote greater social and political advancement in the region.

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